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The working poor hit on many sides

By Cynthia Croom

One of the most difficult moments for any organization is when it does not have enough funds to help the many qualified people that seek financial assistance.

It has been well publicized over at least the last two years that our agency has run out of energy assistance funds three to six months before the end of the program year.

This meant that more than 1,300 eligible low-income residents could not receive much-needed assistance with their electricity and natural gas payments.

These turbulent economic times have not only impacted those who traditionally seek assistance, but it has also impacted our entire community.

Many customers are seeking our assistance for the first time in addition to those who have always struggled to handle their day-to-day expenses. Many seniors that have worked for years now living on fixed incomes are now unable to meet the demands of rising cost of food, health care and energy bills.

People who are considered the working poor are being hit on every side. In addition to rising food and energy costs, many are facing reduction of work hours or layoffs due to the declining economy.

Funding needed in Nashville

The recent announcement by the Tennessee Department of Human Services of \$80 million for the state of Tennessee is good for our county. For the funds to be awarded at this time is critically important because it enables us to serve as many eligible people as we can without turning anyone away due to lack of funding.

Although we are not sure what our allotment of the energy funding will be for Davidson County, we are certain that if we did not receive funding soon, we would have run out of funding by December.

As of last week, we assisted 3,707 customers with their energy bills. Just three months into the program we have already served nearly 70 percent of the amount of customers we served last year, which was a total of 5,993 people. This is definitely an indicator that more people are reaching out for help.

Many who seek help do work

Some people think that residents that seek our assistance are people who do not work or have chosen not to work in order to receive government assistance. This is not what we see.

Approximately 1,100 of the customers that we've served this program year are employed. Another 1,043 customers are on a "fixed income" such as Social Security benefits or receiving disability payments.

For many families we are the last resort. They have done all they could to keep from seeking governmental assistance, but they cannot manage the mounting financial burdens.

This funding allows us to serve our customers with dignity without having to add further financial stress upon their situation by turning them away when they seek our help.

These families need us to care about them and help provide for their children. We are thankful to the advocates that fought to secure this funding.
